

Message Text

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FOLNG SENT NEW DELHI INFO BOMBAY - MADRAS AND DACCA FROM
CALCUTTA DTD 23 FEB.

QUOTE: CALCUTTA 0460

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJ: SANJAY GANDHI'S VISIT TO CALCUTTA

REF: CALCUTTA 417

1. OUR OVERALL IMPRESSION IS THAT SANJAY GANDHI'S VISIT TO
CALCUTTA ON FEBRUARY 21 WAS MODERATELY SUCCESSFUL, THOUGH
LESS SO THAN HIS SUPPORTERS HERE CLAIM, AND THAT THE MOD-
ERATE-CONSERVATIVE WING OF THE CONGRESS PARTY HAS BEEN
STRENGTHENED BY IT.

2. SANJAY DID ALL THE RIGHT THINGS FOR A VISIT TO CALCUTTA,
INCLUDING VISITING THE NETAJI (SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSZP) MEMORIAL
ADDRESSING A FEW PHRASES IN BENGALI IN HIS SPEECH ON THE
MAIDAN, AND WE ARE TOLD THAT THOSE WHO SAW HIM ADMIRE HIS
COMPORTMENT. NONETHELESS, CALCUTTA'S BENGALI MIDDLE CLASS
AND STUDENTS DID NOT TURN OUT FOR SANJAY, AND WE ARE TOLD
THEIR COMMENTS WERE CYNICAL AND IN MANY INSTANCES QUITE
CRITICAL. NONE OF THE PAPERS QUOTES A FIGURE FOR THE CROWD
AT THE RALLY THAT SANJAY ADDRESSED AND THIS IS ONE OF THE
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FEW INSTANCES IN WHICH WE HAVE FOUND POLICE OFFICERS RE-

LUCTANT TO GIVE AN ESTIMATE. ONE OFFICIAL, HOWEVER, PUT THE NUMBER AT FIFTY TO SIXTY THOUSAND, AND ONE OF OUR LOCAL EMPLOYEES WHO ATTENDED SAYS IT WAS DEFINITELY LESS THAN ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND, NOT A LARGE NUMBER AS CALCUTTA MAIDAN RALLIES GO. IN ANY EVENT, IT WAS WELL BELOW THE FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND THAT THE ORGANIZERS WERE AIMING FOR. WE ARE TOLD THAT THE CROWD WAS COMPOSED MAINLY OF WORKERS AND PEASANTS BROUGHT IN FROM THE SURROUNDING DISTRICTS.

3. SANJAY SPOKE AT THE MAIDAN RALLY FOR ONLY SOME TEN TO TWELVE MINUTES (ACCORDING TO AMRITA BAZAR PATRIKA HE THEREBY "SHOWED HIS DEVOTION TO HIS OWN SLOGAN--BAT KAM, KAM JYADA") AND HIS SPEECH WAS COMPOSED OF MANY BY NOW FAMILIAR THEMES: THERE MUST BE UNITY IN CONGRESS, THE PARTY MUST WORK TO UPLIFT THE DOWNTRODDEN, PEOPLE SHOULD ESCHEW IDEOLOGIES OF THE LEFT OR RIGHT AND WORK FOR THE GOOD OF THE NATION, THE EMERGENCY SAVED THE COUNTRY FROM A REACTIONARY TAKEOVER (SANJAY REPORTEDLY REFERRED IN THIS CONNECTION TO BANGLADESH), THE FOREIGN PRESS AND OTHER CRITICS SHOULD SEE THE SITUATION IN INDIA IN ITS PROPER PERSPECTIVE AND THOSE WHO SHOUT THAT DEMOCRACY IS BEING BURIED IN INDIA ARE WRONG. IN ADDITION, HOWEVER, SANJAY ATTACKED "COMMUNIST-MARXISTS" WHOM HE ACCUSED OF USING FASCIST METHODS AND TRYING TO SUBVERT NATIONAL UNITY BY MASQUERADING AS ANTI-FASCISTS. IT WAS THE COMMUNIST-MARXISTS, HE SAID, WHO JOINED THE BRITISH AND OPPOSED NETAJI'S STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM. "BRANDING THE COMMUNISTS AS THE AGENTS OF THE CAPITALISTS, MR. GANDHI SAID THAT THEY MOUNTED PHRASES OF LEFTISM, TOOK MONEY FROM THE INDUSTRIALISTS, AND ULTIMATELY EXPLOITED THE WORKING CLASS." (AMRITA BAZAR PATRIKA) BY ALL ACCOUNTS, SANJAY'S ATTACK ON THE COMMUNISTS WAS PHRASED SO THAT IT WOULD APPEAR LITERALLY THAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT THE CPM, BUT HIS REMARKS WERE GENERALLY INTERPRETED AS BEING AIMED AS WELL AT THE CPI. CHIEF MINISTER RAY, SPEAKING AFTER SANJAY BOTH AT THE MAIDAN RALLY AND TO THE ASSEMBLED CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE, PICKED UP THIS THEME AND PURSUED IT. THE PRESS REPORTS THAT IN HIS MAIDAN ADDRESS RAY ATTACKED THE CPI YOUTH ORGANIZATION; THE PAPERS SAY THAT IN SPEAKING TO THE CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE HE CRITICIZED "EXTREMISTS" BUT THOSE PRESENT TELL US THAT

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HE DECLARED THAT "IN WEST BENGAL WE ARE FIGHTING COMMUNISM."

4. COVERAGE OF SANJAY'S VISIT BY THE NON-COMMUNISTS PRESS RANGES FROM ADULATORY TO AT LEAST INTERESTED. AMRITA BAZAR PATRIKA AND JUGANTAR, CONTROLLED BY CONSERVATIVE GOWB MINISTERS TARUN KANTI AND PRAFULLA KANTI GHOSH, DEVOTED THEIR ENTIRE FRONT PAGES TO THE VISIT, WITH HEADLINES SUCH AS "CALCUTTA GOES SANJAY-MAD" AND "SANJAY TAKES

CALCUTTA BY STORM." MASS CIRCULATION ANANDA BAZAR PATRIKA AND ITS SMALL ENGLISH LANGUAGE AFTERNOON DAILY HINDUSTAN STANDARD ALSO GAVE BROAD AND FAVORABLE COVERAGE TO THE VISIT. THE STATESMAN WAS MORE RESERVED, WITH ONLY A TWO COLUMN FRONT PAGE STORY AND A PICTURE (EDITOR NIHAL SINGH REMARKED DRYLY "WE COVERED IT AS NEWS, NOT AS POLITICAL PROPAGANDA"). CPI DAILY KALANTAR, HOWEVER VIRTUALLY IGNORED THE VISIT, GIVING IT ONLY A BRIEF ONE COLUMN NOTICE ON THE FOURTH PAGE OF THE PAPER'S FEBRUARY 22 EDITION. ON FEBRUARY 23 KALANTAR CARRIES AN EDITORIAL CRITICAL OF A STATEMENT MADE BY SANJAY ON FEBRUARY 20 IN BIHAR (HE SAID THE SAME THING IN CALCUTTA) CALLING ON PEOPLE TO ESCHEW IDEOLOGIES. OBSERVERS NOTED THAT PROMINENT LEFTIST WEST BENGAL CONGRESS FIGURES P.R. DAS MUNSHI AND SAUGATA ROY, AND LEFTIST GOWB MINISTERS (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SUBRATA MUKERJEE) WERE ABSENT FROM ALL THE FUNCTIONS HELD FOR SANJAY.

5. IF THE CPI AND THE CONGRESS LEFT WAS UNHAPPY AND SULKING, THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY WAS DELIGHTED WITH SANJAY. PRESS ACCOUNTS OF SANJAY'S APPEARANCE BEFORE THE CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT HE DELIVERED A STERN LECTURE: "WORKERS MUST HAVE A SAY IN MANAGEMENT" IS HOW AMRITA HEADLINES ITS STORY, HOWEVER, BUSINESSMEN WE HAVE TALKED TO WHO WERE THERE SAY THE CHAMBERS WERE MUCH IMPRESSED BY SANJAY AND VERY ENCOURAGED BY WHAT HE HAD TO SAY: HE SPOKE OF THE NEED FOR A REDUCTION IN INCOME TAXES AND WHEN ASKED HIS ATTITUDE ABOUT NATIONALIZATIONS REPLIED THAT "EVERYONE KNOWS I'M OPPOSED TO NATIONALIZATION." ALTHOUGH HE QUALIFIED THIS BY SAYING THAT NATIONALIZATION MAY BE NECESSARY IN CERTAIN CASES WHERE BUSINESSMEN ARE CORRUPT OR INEFFICIENT-- AND ALSO HEDGED HIS WELCOME OF FOREIGN INVESTMENT WITH A REMARK THAT FOREIGN FIRMS TEND TO SEND OUTDATED TECHNOLOGY TO INDIA--WE ARE TOLD THAT IT WAS ALL SAID IN A TONE OF CONFIDENTIAL

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LEVEL-HEADED REASONABLENESS. ONE OF OUR INDUSTRIALIST FRIENDS, HARDLY ABLE TO CONTAIN HIS DELIGHT, PAID SANJAY THE ULTIMATE COMPLIMENT: "HE WAS JUST A BUSINESSMEN AT A BOARD MEETING, DIRECT, TO THE POINT, AND NO NONSENSE."

6. THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND THE MODERATE-CONSERVATIVE WING OF THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS PARTY ARE PARTICULARLY PLEASED OVER CHIEF MINISTER RAY'S PUBLIC ATTACK ON THE CPI. WHILE SOME SAY THAT RAY HAS ALL ALONG BEEN ANTI-COMMUNIST, IF THIS IS HIS TRUE FEELING HE HAS BEEN ABLE TO DISGUISE IT WHEN POLITICALLY EXPEDIENT. CONGRESS MODERATE-CONSERVATIVES BELIEVE THAT SANJAY'S VISIT HAS MOVED RAY SQUARELY INTO THEIR CAMP AND HAS, THEY HOPE, SHIFTED THE BALANCE WITHIN THE PARTY IN THEIR FAVOR. THIS IS PROBABLY SO FOR THE MOMENT, BUT THE LEFTIST WING OF CONGRESS IS STRONG IN WEST BENGAL AND WILL

NOT EASILY BE SUBDUED. AND THE ENTHUSIASM THAT THE MARWARI
AND PUNJABI BUSINESSMEN SHOW FOR SANJAY IS ENOUGH IN
ITSELF TO MAKE MANY BENGALIS DISLIKE HIM.
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